



what's up?

physical growth & development

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

What's it all about?

Puberty! One minute they are children. The next they appear as adults! In a short span of years teens grow, change in shape and become capable of producing children—all triggered by hormonal changes which start the processes of puberty.

Adults face two major issues when looking at adolescent growth and development:

- Understanding the adolescents in the context of their own experiences as well as the expectations of the adult world
- Helping the adolescents know if their growth falls within the parameters of “normal,” or when to seek additional help.

Why does it matter?

Adolescents are often asking “Am I normal?” They worry: “I don’t look like my friends.” “I’m too tall/short, fat/thin.” Adults who reassure them and give clear, helpful information can support teens through this confusing and challenging time. Knowledgeable adults can help teens learn to cope with the changes in their bodies and avoid problems.

Note: It is important to keep in mind that teens’ physical and emotional development don’t always occur at the same pace. So, although a teen may have the body that looks like an adult, they are still developing the emotional maturity that goes along with it!

What are the details?

Stage	Physical Changes in Girls	Physical Changes in Boys
Early (11-14 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• body fat increases• breasts begin to enlarge• height and weight increases• first menstrual period• hips widen• skin and hair become more oily, pimples may appear• underarm hair growth• appetite/nutrition needs change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• testicles grow larger• underarm and facial hair growth• pubic hair grows• pimples may appear• height and weight increases• muscles develop• voice deepens• appetite/nutrition needs change• breasts can get tender
Middle (15-17 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• usually have reached full physical development• increased concern about physical image, weight• eating habits change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• close to full physical development• voice continues to lower• facial hair appears• continue to gain height/muscle• eating habits change
Late (18-19 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• few physical changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• few physical changes



PHYSICAL GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

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What can I do?

As an adult in a teen's life, there are many things you can do to help them safely move through the growth and development of adolescence. Here are a few tips:

- Provide solid, accurate information about the physical changes teens experience.
- Reassure teens that there is a great deal of variation in "normal growth and development."
- Support healthy food choices. For instance, teens need lots of calcium-rich foods for bone growth. Remember, these years are when teens develop life-long eating habits. Provide healthy alternatives to "junk food."
- If eating habits start jeopardizing health (i.e. unreasonable dieting, rapid weight gain or loss) do not hesitate to consult a doctor.
- Encourage regular physical activity. Regular exercise contributes to a teen's health—from walking to school to organized sports. Be a role model by exercising regularly yourself.
- Provide information or encourage teens to learn more about growth and development.
- If something seems wrong, consult a health care provider. There is no harm in asking questions.
- If a teen does not have health insurance, check eligibility for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). CHIP provides health coverage to children whose families have too much income to qualify for the children's Medicaid program but who don't have, or can't afford, private insurance for their children.

What's up with puberty?

What milestones define puberty?

- Reproductive organs mature and secondary sex characteristics develop (e.g. pubic hair, facial hair).
- Bones grow rapidly (adolescent growth spurt), then slow before finally stopping.
- The body's shape, as well as its distribution of fat changes.
- Strength and endurance increase.
- The mind and emotions change and mature. The teen develops more "adult" feelings, ideas and values.

Major outcomes of puberty:

- Adult size, shape and appearance
- Physical distinction between sexes
- Ability to reproduce

Features of puberty:

- The sequence of changes is similar for all persons.
- There may be a wide variation in tempo (when it starts and how long it takes).
- Physical changes that can be seen in the body and mental/emotional changes (mood swings, changes in values, strong romantic attachments) reflect the normal hormonal changes that go on inside the body and mind of the teen.

**hot
links!**

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Facts for Families

Normal Adolescent Development: Middle School and Early High School Years (Fact Sheet #57)—

www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/develop.htm

Late High School Years and Beyond (Fact Sheet #58)—www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/develop2.htm

Teaching Teens about Puberty Educator's On-line Resource—www.teachingteens.com/tpubrt.htm

Washington State Children's Health Insurance Program 1-877-KIDS-NOW or <http://maa.dshs.wa.gov/CHIP/Index.html>

Washington State Youth Risk Behavior Survey 1999 Published August 2000 by WA State Department of Health—www.doh.wa.gov/publicat/publications.htm

Bright Futures 11, 12, 13, and 14 Year Early Adolescence Visits—www.brightfutures.org/adolescence/eaframe.htm and www.brightfutures.org/adolescence/adtoc.htm

Society for Adolescent Medicine www.adolescenthealth.org

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